

Message Text

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USIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 5993

E.O. 11652: NGDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: AN EYEWITNESS RETURNS FROM "CHRISTIANLAND"

1. NICK LUDINGTON, BUREAU CHIEF OF AP IN BEIRUT, HAS JUST RETURNED FROM WEEK IN CHRISTIAN AREA OF LEBANON. ON UNDERSTANDING THAT HIS IDENTITY AS SOURCE WOULD BEPROTECTED, HE SHARED FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND OBSERVATIONS WITH COUNTRY TEAM.

2. SEPARATION WITHOUT PARTITION. WHILE FORMAL PARTITION WAS REJECTED BY ALMOST ALL CHRISTIANS WITH WHOM LUDINGTON SPOKE, TOP CHRISTIAN SPOKESMEN DID EMPHASIZE THAT SOME FORM OF REGIONALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION WOULD HAVE TO BE PART OF ANY IMMEDIATE SOLUTION TO LEBANESE CRISIS. HE AGREED WITH AN EMBOFF'S ASSESSMENT THAT THIS REFLECTS A CHRISTIAN, PARTICULARLY MARONITE, DESIRE TO "RETREAT" INTO MOUNT LEBANON UNTIL SUCH TIME AS PALESTINE QUESTION IS FULLY SOLVED AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS NO LONGER DOMINATE LEBANESE SBODY POLITIC.

3. "PURIFICATION" AND CONSOLIDATION OF CHRISTIAN AREA. HAVING COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO SEPARATE EXISTENCE FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE, CHRISTIANS, AND MORE PARTICULARLY MARONITES, HAVE MADE CONFIDENTIAL

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"PURIFICATION" OF AREA UNDER THEIR CONTROL A PRIORITY GOAL.

OCCUPATION OF JISR AL-BASHA AND TALL AZ-ZA'TAR

PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IS, FOR CHRISTIANS, INDISPENSABLE FIRST STEP. LARGEY LEBANESE SHI'ITE URBAN SLUM QUARTER OF NAB'A, WHICH ALSO HARBORS PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST GANGSTERS, AS WELL AS LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY FOLLOWERS, WILL BE NEXT, WHERE THEY EXPECT NO GREAT DIFFICULTY. THEY ARE ALREADY ENCOURAGING SHI'ITES TO LEAVE FOR WEST BEIRUT. WITH OCCUPATION OF NAB'A, THEY WILL HAVE ELIMINATED MAJOR NON-CHRISIAN AND NON-LEBANESE POCKETS AND ASSURED RESIDENTS OF CHRISTIAN QUARTER OF ASHRAFIYYA FREE AND SECURE ACCESS TO CHRISTIAN MOUNT LEBANON. THEY WILL THEN CONCENTRATE ON ELIMINATING RADICAL PARTIES SUCH AS PPS IN CHRISTIAN TOWNS IN THE METN AND KOURA REGIONS.

4. PLIGHT OF CHRISTIANS LIVING IN AREAS NOT UNDER CHRISTIAN CONTROL IS OF LITTLE CONCERN TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS. THEY ARE AWARE OF DANGER TO WHICH ISOLATED CHRISTIAN VILLAGES IN NON-CHRISTIAN AREAS SUCH AS THE CHOUF, SOUTH LEBANON, THE BEKAA, AND AKKAR, AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN RESIDENT INWEST BEIRUT, ARE EXPOSED AND ARE WELCOMING THEM IN CHRISTIAN AREAS WHENEVER POSSIBLE. THEIR TROUBLE IS THAT THOSE CHRISTIANS WHO CHOOSE NOT TO MOVE MUST BEAR THE CONSEQUENCES.

5. LUDINGTON NOTED THAT THOSE CHRISTIANS LIVING OUTSIDE CHRISTIAN AREA ARE -- PERHAPS DEFENSIVELY -- AMONG MOST VIRULENT OPPONENTS OF SEPARATION ORPARTITION. THEY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO MAKE THEIR PEACE WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND VIEW THE ACTIONS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS AS THREATENING THEIR MODUS VIVENDI.

6. TALL AZ-ZA'TAR AS EXAMPLE OF CHRISTIAN FIELD OPERATIONS. CHRISTIANS DO NOT VIEW TALL AZ-ZA'TAR AS MAJOR MILITARY PROBLEM, AND DELAY IN COMPLETING ITS OCCUPATION ATTRIBUTABLE, IN LUDINGTON'S OPINION, TO CHRISITIAN DESIRE TO AVOID SUFFERING AND UNNECESSARY CASUALTIES BY STARVING RATHER THAN OVERRUNNING THE CAMP. WILLIAM HAWI, MILITARY COMMANDER OF PHALANGE, TOLD LUDINGTON THAT TALL AZ-ZA'TAR WOULD SURELY FALL, ONLY QUESTION WAS WHEN. LUDINGTON ESTIMATED NUMBER OF FIGHTERS INSIDE CAMP TO HAVE BEEN ORIGINALLY ONE TO TWO THOUSAND.

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LEFTIST/PALESTINIAN ATTEMPTS TO RELIEVE CAMP THROUGH MONTE VERDE WERE A JOKE; MAIN EFFORT CONSISTED OF ONLY 50 LIGHTLY ARMED MEN SLOGGING IT OUT ON FOOT FROM DAMASCUS ROAD ABOVE KAHALE.

7. COMMAND POST FOR ASSAULT AS A WHOLE IS MAR SHAYA MONASTERY OVERLOOKING CAMP. A CERTAIN "BRIGADIER AOUN, LEBANESE ARMY OFFICER, COORDINATES ACTIVITIES OF VARIOUS

CHRSTIAN MILITIAS IN PRESENCE OF SUCH LEADERS AS DANY CHAMOUN, MILITARY COMMANDER OF NATIONAL LIBERALS, AND BASHIR GEMAYEL, MILITARY COMMANDER OF METN REGION FOR PHALANGE. AOUN'S EFFORTS CONSTITUTE ONE OF FEW LINKS AMONG CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, WHICH TEND TO REMAIN AUTONOMOUS ON GROUND. ACCORDING TO LUDINGTON, AOUN IS BUT ONE OF MANY LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS WORKING WITH CHRISTIAN MILITIAS, PARTICULARLY IN FIELD OF COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT.

8. THE FIGHTERS ARE COMMITTED. US-TRAINED CAPTAIN IN CHARGE OF PORTION OF ASSAULT, MOVING IN FROM MKALLES SIDE, CLAIMS THAT, GIVEN DEGREE OF COMMITMENT OF HIS MEN, HE WOULD BE UNABLE TO COMPEL THEM TO OBSERVE A CEASE-FIRE ORDER. ACCORDING TO LUDINGTON, CEDAR GUARDS (HURRAS AL-ARZ) FIGHTERS ARE MOST FANATIC OF ALL. PALESTINIANS ARE ANATHEMA. ONE FIGHTER LUDINGTON SPOKE TO SPAT EVERY TIME HE SAID WORD "PALESTINIAN."

9. AMERICAN ARMS -- ESPECIALLY M-16S -- ARE MUCH IN EVIDENCE AMONG VARIOUS CHRISTIAN MILITIAS. IN ADDITION, SEVERAL FIGHTERS AT TALL AZ ZATAR OPENLY AND PROUDLY BRANDISHED ISRAELI WEAPONS WITH SERIAL NUMBERS FILED OFF. LUDINGTON ESTIMATES THAT CASUALTIES ON CHRISTIAN SIDE HAVE BEEN LIGHT, PERHAPS 100 FOR ENTIRE BATTLE.

10. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF CHRISTIAN AREA. LUDINGTON CONFIRMED THAT MONKS OF KASLIK ARE STILL VERY MUCH INTELLECTUAL MOVERS OF CHRISTIAN AREA. HOWEVER, DAY-TO-DAY AFFAIRS ARE MANAGED BY TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND PARTIES AND THEIR FOLLOWERS.

1. TO GIVE THEIR "SEPARATENESS" STRUCTURE, CHRISTIANS SET UP PROVISIONAL ADMINISTRATION SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. THEY AVOID USE OF WORD "GOVERNMENT;" INSTEAD, THEY STYLE IT "DAR AL-AMAL," WHICH MEANS LITERALLY LABOR HOUSE," BUT WHICH COULD JUST AS CONFIDENTIAL

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EASILY BE TRANSLATED "ACTION CENTRAL." STAFFED BY FORMER CHRISTIAN EMPLOYEES OF DEFUNCT CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, DAR AL'AMAL PARALLELS PHALANGE PARTY, WHICH IS ONLY FULLY DEVELOPED POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN THE CHRISTIAN AREA. PHHALANGE DENIES IT CONTROLS DAR AL-'AMAL, BUTPIERRE GEMAYEL HEADS ITS POLITBURO . EXECUTIVE SECRETARY IS MRS. JOSEPH ASWAD, HIS DAUGHTER. IT HANDLES "FUNCTIONS" OF DEFENSE, INTERNAL SECURITY, JUSTICE, PUBLIC WORKS, FINANCE, EDUCATION, SUPPLY,AND HEALTH. DEFENSE, INTERNAL SECURITY, AND JUSTICE ARE DIRECTLY SUPERVISED BY BASHIR GEMAYEL, PIERRE'S SON.

12. DAR AL-'AMAL HAS SET UP PROVISIONAL TRIBUNALS TO TRY CRIMINALS AND HAS EMPOWERED THEM TO IMPOSE SENTENCES UP TO AND INCLUDING DEATH; IRONICALLY, CLEMENCY CAN BE GRANTED ONLY BY CAMILLE CHAMOUN OR PIERRE GEMAYEL. SIXTY CRIMINALS HAVE

SO FAR BEEN JAILED. TAXES -- ESPECIALLY ON REAL ESTATE AND IMPORTED LUXURY GOODS -- ARE BEING COLLECTED AND PRICE CONTROLS HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED. THERE ARE PLANS TO BUILD A PORT (PERHAPS AT CHEKKA) AND AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT SUPERIOR IN LOCATION AND FACILITIES TO BEIRUT AIRPORT, AND TO REBUILD INDUSTRIES AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK. IN FIELD OF HEALTH, LEBANESE DOCTORS WORKING IN FRANCE HAVE SENT AT LEAST TWO SHIPLOADS OF SUPPLIES TO HOSPITALS IN CHRISTIAN AREA. IN FIELD OF INFORMATION, NEW LEBANESE NEWS AGENCY, MANAGED BY JOSEPH ABU KHALIL, DAILY NEWSPAPER "AL-AMAL," AND "VOICE OF LEBANON" RADIO ALL SPEAK FOR PHALANGE/DAR AL-'AMAL. RADIO LEBANON FROM AMCHIT, ON OTHER HANDS, SPEAKS STRICTLY FOR PRESIDENT FRANJIEH AND HIS ENTOURAGE, ESPECIALLY RAMIZ KHAZIN, FORMER DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF INFORMATION. COORDINATION BETWEEN THE TWO INFORMATION MACHINES IS NON-EXISTENT; INDEED, PHALANGE REGARDS EFFORTS OF RADIO AMCHIT AS UTTERLY JUVENILE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 5993

13. ON LOCAL LEVEL, "POPULAR COMMITTEES" REPRESENTING DAR AL-'AMAL FUNCTION IN EACH VILLAGE, TOWN, AND URBAN QUARTER IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH INHABITANTS. SERVICES INCLUDE FOOD DISTRIBUTION, GARBAGE COLLECTION, AND AID TO SICK AND ELDERLY.

14. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. IN ALL OF THIS, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS SEEN AS IRRELEVANT. LACKING A MILITIA OF HIS OWN, EVEN PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS IS VIEWED AS IRRELEVANT.

15. POPULATION DYNAMICS. JOSEPH ABU KHALIL TOLD LUDINGTON THAT HE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF LEBANESE INCHRISTIAN AREA TO BE AROUND ONE MILLION. INDEPENDENT ESTIMATES AVAILABLE TO LUDINGTON ARE CLOSE TO HALF MILLION. CHRISTIAN LEBANESE OVERSEAS ARE ENCOURAGED TO RETURN TO CHRISTIAN AREA, BUT INFLOW IS SMALL; FOR ONE THING, THE TWELVE BOATS WHICH PLY LARNACA- JOUNIEH ROUTE CARRY ONLY 12 PASSENGERS OUT OF LARNACA IN COMPLIANCE WITH SYRIOT SAFETY REGULATIONS, BUT UP TO 65 ON RETURN VOYAGE. TO DISCOURAGE EMIGRATION, A DEPARTURE TAX OF 100 LEBANESE POUNDS PER PERSON IS LEVIED IN JOUNIEH, AND FOR MILITARY REASONS YOUNG MEN ARE FORBIDDEN EXIT ENTIRELY. ACCORDING TO ABU KHALIL, CHRISTIAN LOSSES IN FIGHTING HAVE NOT BEEN GREAT-- 2,000 CIVILIANS AND CONFIDENTIAL

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500 FIGHTERS KILLED IN 15 MONTHS OF CRISIS.

16. SYRIAN PRESENCE. CHRISTIANS APPRECIATE NEED FOR AND ADVANTAGES OF SYRIAN PRESENCE OR ROLE IN LEBANON, EVEN WHILE REGARDING SYRIANS AS COUNTRY BUMPKINS. WITH SYRIANS NOW IN FULL CONTROL OF ZAHLE- "UYUN AS-SIMAN-FARAYA ROAD, THERE IS SOME TALK OF OPENING IT FOR CHRISTIAN TRAVELERS TO DAMASCUS. AT PRESENT, HOWEVER, SYRIANS FORBID ALL TRAFFIC BEYOND CREST OF MOUNTAIN, AND IMPOSE THEIR OWN DISCIPLINE ON CHRISTIAN FORCES ON WESTERN SLOPES.

17. SYRIAN INTENTIONS. LUDINGTON COULD GET NO FEEL FOR HOW CHRISTIANS VIEW SYRIA'S ULTIMATE INTENTIONS. HE PERSONALLY TAKES VIEW QUITE DIFFERENT FROM MOST FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IN BEIRUT. INSTEAD OF VIEWING SYRIAN MOVES IN LEBANON AS PRELUDE TO SYRIAN ACCEPTANCE OF RENEWED EFFORTS TOWARDS A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT IN MIDDLE EAST, HE BELIEVES THEY FORESHADOW HARDENING OF SYRIAN POSITION VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL EVEN TO POINT OF LAUNCHING WAR, IN WHICH CASE CONTROL OF THE BEKAA AND OF LEBANESE BORDER AREAS WOULD BE ESSENTIAL.
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